Sustainability in coastal tourism development: an example from Denmark

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Tourism development at coastlines varies significantly across the globe; from areas where hotels and resorts crowd the coastlines to highly protected areas with restricted human access. During the past 80 years, the coastlines in Denmark has been protected from development and construction. However, in 2014 the Danish politicians opened up for softer regulation at the Danish coastline and invited municipalities and other actors to propose tourism development projects within the hitherto protected coastal zone. The call for development projects, it was explicitly stated that the projects should be sustainable. By comparing the approved projects to academic discourses of sustainability, this paper provides new perspectives on how sustainable tourism development was addressed by actors in Danish tourism. Key findings indicate that tourism actors do not comprehensively address the holistic concept of sustainable tourism development. Longer-term perspectives are mostly invisible whereas economic effects and benefits are emphasised. Key findings also indicate a lack of political leadership in the envisaged transfer towards sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism Development, Coastal Tourism, Tourism Policy, Denmark.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a strong focus on the sustainable development of tourism (Butler, 1991; Font & Harris, 2004; Neto, 2003; Liburd & Edwards, 2010). Sustainable tourism development has been extensively researched (e.g. Buckley, 2012; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005; Neto, 2003; Saarinen, 2006) and there are many ways in which to define and conceptualise sustainability in tourism development. A common notion is that tourism development should be based on the environmental, socio-cultural and economic pillars of sustainability (Buckley, 2012; Hall, 2000; Lansing & De Vries, 2007; Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005; Mowforth & Munt, 2016; United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) & United Nations World Tourism Organisation (WTO), 2005).

A considerable part of tourism development takes places in coastal areas (Bramwell, 2004; Ong & Smith, 2014; Rajan, Varghese, & Pradeepkumar, 2013). The concept of sustainable development is argued to be a useful and necessary tool for developing tourism in environmentally fragile and sensitive places, such as coastal areas (e.g. Butler, 199; Hopkins, et al., 2012; Mowforth & Munt, 2016). Denmark is widely respected for its environmental standards visible, among others, along its unspoilt and untouched coastal areas (Bramwell & Alletorp, 2001). Denmark has an 80 year-
old tradition for protecting the coastlines through laws and policies that forbid, or at least heavily restrict development within 300 metres of the coastal zone. However, in 2014 the neoliberal government in Denmark decided to open up for tourism development within the coastal zone (Danish Business Authority, 2014). A ‘pilot scheme’ project was initiated to give municipalities and tourism stakeholders an opportunity to apply for dispensation from coastal zone protections in order to open up for new development projects at the coastline. The following criteria for selection were applied

1. There must be a potential for developing coastal and nature-based tourism, attracting foreign tourists and the possibility to deliver this potential within the project.
2. The construction of physical projects must be connected to existing tourism activities in the area to ensure the largest possible synergy and the project must adhere to other political considerations for tourism in the planning of the municipality to ensure a cohesive development of the area.
3. The physical projects must be sustainable and architecturally adapted to match the surrounding nature and landscape” (Danish Business Authority, 2014: 13, translated by the authors).

The three criteria explicate how the projects should develop coastal and nature-based tourism in a consistent manner (1 and 2), while the ‘physical projects’ should be sustainable (3). The meaning of ‘sustainable’ is not subject to further clarification. Based on these selection criteria ten development projects were approved.

How does the Danish tourism actors behind the development projects view sustainability and does this view align with sustainability as a theoretical concept? Or is sustainability in these development projects fundamentally different from how academics define sustainable tourism development (STD)? This paper aims to analyse the ten development project proposals visible communication of STD and thereby add to existing knowledge on STD by looking into the specific case of the ten tourism development projects approved by the Danish politicians in 2015. In doing so, this paper seeks to establish evidence of sustainability in the ten development project proposals and how the tourism actors behind the projects represent understandings of STD in the respective proposals. The objectives of the paper is thereby to confront practices of actual tourism development projects in coastal tourism with the mature body of literature on STD to examine how sustainability is communicated and made sense of by the tourism stakeholders behind the ten development project proposals and to which degree this aligns with, or diverges from, academic understandings of the topic.

**Background of the Pilot Scheme Project**

In order to highlight how the Danish politicians were willing to open up for a few development projects, but disinterested in massive development and construction along the coastline, the politicians introduced the ‘pilot scheme’ initiative as follows:
”... a pilot scheme that will give selected destinations the opportunity to establish sustainable physical tourism projects with future development opportunities and perspective, in order to improve coastal and nature-based tourism in Denmark” (Danish Business Authority, 2014: 13, translated by the authors).

The idea behind the pilot scheme is to help foster sustainable physical tourism projects that would ensure growth and development in the Danish tourism sector, especially in the rural areas along the Danish coast. Researchers and other actors in the Danish tourism sector have noted that tourism is an increasingly important element in the Danish economy (e.g. Eriksen & Ahmt, 1999; Halkier, 2014; VisitDenmark, 2015). Several studies (e.g. Centre for Coastal Tourism (CKT), 2013; Halkier, 2014; Lyck, 2002) document and analyse the decline in tourism arrivals and international competitiveness in Denmark. The pilot scheme project gave municipalities and tourism stakeholders an opportunity to propose plans for projects along the coastline, hereby facilitating new tourism development and hopefully turning the decline into growth. In October 2015, permission was given to ten development projects (Danish Business Authority, 2015a). Two additional projects were granted permission, as they could be developed within the existing legal framework and due to this, these two projects will not be examined here. When the ten projects were announced by the Danish Business Authority, the word “sustainable” was nowhere to be found (Danish Business Authority, 2015b). The third criterion is rephrased as follows [translated by the authors].

3. The physical projects must be adapted architectonical to match the surrounding nature and landscape (Danish Business Authority, 2015b: 2).

No explanation of why ‘sustainable’ was omitted has been provided. Still the ten projects were developed to meet the original criteria and should thus indicate how tourism actors in Denmark in fact proposed to implement sustainable tourism development within the coastal zone. The ten development projects are described in short in table 1 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Short Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Blaavand Beach park</td>
<td>Construction of wellness facilities, luxury vacation apartments, restaurant, shops and a nature promenade/boardwalk connecting Blaavand beach and Hvidbjerg beach. Estimated to create a yearly revenue of 25 million DKKR. The project proposal makes no specific mentioning of the term sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Soendervig Holiday park</td>
<td>Construction of 500 holiday houses, the largest indoor waterpark in Northern Europe and wellness facilities. Expected yearly increase of foreign bednights up to 620,000. Estimated investment: 750 million - 1 billion DKKR. Focus on new energy saving technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dune hotel in Loekken</td>
<td>Construction of a new hotel, conference facilities and restaurant, a wellness centre, pathways and viewpoints among the dunes, 10 new beach houses on the beach and rebuilding an old water tower. The proposal uses references to sustainability stating that sustainability is a large factor in protecting the existing nature values and the project therefore requires good arguments to become a reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Beach life Fjellerup</td>
<td>Construction of 4 connected activity points on the 2.5 km beach/coast line of Fjellerup. There is no specific mentioning of the term sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nordals Holiday Resort</td>
<td>Construction of 2 hotels, 400 holiday homes, 2 campsites, water experiences, marina for 100 boats, shops and restaurants and trail and hiking paths. Expected to attract up to 560,000 guest on a yearly basis. Estimated investment: 1.3 billion DKKR. The proposal describes sustainability in the project as focus on solutions of high architectural quality and aims to incorporate a green profile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Island center Christiansminde</td>
<td>Construction of building with room for activities such as teaching and a cafe, water sports, a promenade, biking trail, facilities for outdoor life and new hotel rooms at the existing hotel Christiansminde. The project is expected to create 10,000 extra bednights and an increase in revenue from tourism in the surrounding municipalities of 15 to 17 million DKKR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Safari Lodge Knuthenborg</td>
<td>Construction of 200 theme based accommodation units combined with conference and dining facilities. The proposal has no mentioning of sustainability or references to material choices or energy use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Aquapark Moen</td>
<td>Construction of 500 holiday houses, experience centre based on water, nature/outdoor activities and industrial culture. Expected to attract 13,000 weekly guest for the new vacation houses and 75,000 day-trippers. Estimated investment: 1.3 billion DKKR. No mentioning of sustainability or how the project will be fitted into the existing landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Visitor center Stevns Klint</td>
<td>Construction of a Visitor centre about Stevns Klint a UNESCO World heritage site, new parking facilities, a nature playground, pathways, new stairs to reach the cliff and improvement of existing viewpoints. Expected to attract 50,000 tourist a year. Focus on a strong local engagement and on sustainability in the municipality evident in their tourism policy. There are some mentioning of sustainability present but no clear definitions in the proposal of the term sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>New Nordic Coast</td>
<td>Construction of a new beach hotel, beach pier with sea bath, rebuilding of the existing piers, broader sand beaches, sauna and an activity area. Expected to attract 30-40,000 more visitors a year. The proposal states that sustainability is to be understood in a broad sense, meaning that the project is working with new and adaptable solutions but also in relation to cheap operating costs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology
This paper examines the ten approved development projects by subjecting data from the project proposals to a qualitative content analysis. It is important to note that this article is only based on data available from the written project proposals. Consequently, the article is not based on deeper insights to the rationale behind the proposals, but only on the presentation of the projects in publicly available documents. The content analysis entails systematic readings of the body of texts, images, and symbolic matters and involves analysis of the meanings, means of communication, messages and symbols in the documents (Krippendorff, 2013). Every content analysis requires a context within which the texts are examined (Krippendorff, 2013) and this paper uses sustainability as the theoretical framework for the analysis. There are considerable differences in both length and levels of depth in the ten written proposals and consequently, the extent to which sustainability is addressed differs significantly. As this paper examines the written proposals and thereby sustainability as communicated herein, the actual implementation of sustainability is not included. Instead, the purpose of the analysis is to investigate how sustainability is communicated in these ten project proposals. Implicitly we acknowledge that sustainability is a long-term transition process, as opposed to a reachable goal (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005; Liburd & Edwards, 2010; Mowforth & Munt, 2016).

Theoretical Framework
STD is not a ‘new’ phenomenon or a ‘new’ theoretical concept. Yet, actual tourism development may not necessarily align with ‘textbook versions’ of sustainability. There is little doubt that STD is a congested subject and it has proven difficult to translate its theoretical construct into practical development and practices (Buckley, 1996; Buckley, 2012; Font & Harris, 2004; Hall, Gössling, & Scott, 2015; Lansing & De Vries, 2007; Mowforth & Munt, 2016; Richards & Hall, 2000; Saarinen, 2006; UNEP & WTO, 2005). STD has, nevertheless, been acknowledged as an important socio-economic driver (Dahles, 2000; Moscardo, 2005; Nyaupanea, Morais, & Dowler, 2006; Ong & Smith, 2014; Sneddon, Howarth, & Norgaard, 2006; UNEP & WTO, 2005) and for environmental management (Buckley, 2012; Butler, 1991). Sustainable development was defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED] in the Brundtland report (WCED, 1987) and has since been adapted to tourism. STD builds on the main sustainability principles referring to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development and a suitable balance must be established between these dimensions to guarantee long-term sustainability (Hall et. al., 2015; Neto, 2003; UNEP & WTO, 2005). STD therefore requires the participation of all relevant stakeholders, strong political leadership and it is a continuous process that requires constant monitoring of effects (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005; UNEP & WTO, 2005).
STD therefore:
“...takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.” (UNEP & WTO, 2005: 12).

As a result, the justification for STD is a long-term and optimal use of economic, socio-cultural and environmental resources for the greater benefit of not only tourists or tourism organisations, but also the host community (Richards & Hall, 2000). As a result, several researchers (Bramwell & Sharmann, 1999; Hall, 2000; Mowforth & Munt, 2016; Simpson, 2008) recommend that governments should prioritise sustainable development for tourism, as they control a wide range of instruments that can influence the sustainable development of tourism.

The Role of Governments in Facilitating STD

Governments play an important role in STD through policies and laws that influence tourism development (Bramwell & Sharmann, 1999; Halkier, 2014; Hall, 2000; Ruhanen, 2013). Governments generally take an interest in tourism issues such as policy making (Bramwell & Sharmann, 1999; Farmaki, 2015; Regeringen, 2014; Simpson, 2008), collaboration among stakeholders (Bramwell & Sharmann, 1999; Dredge, et al., 2011) and tourism development in general (Farmaki, 2015; Moscardo, 2011; Simpson, 2008). Tourism researchers generally agree that it is necessary to integrate STD into all levels of policymaking on local, regional and national levels, supporting the role of governments as a major actor in STD (Bramwell & Sharmann, 1999; Farmaki, 2015; Ruhanen, 2013). Governments often see tourism as a development tool to foster economic growth and employment (Hall, 2000; Mowforth & Munt, 2016; Simpson, 2008). However, Sneddon, Howarth, & Norgaard (2006) argue that there is a lack of progress in how governments deal with sustainable development and Choi & Sirakaya (2006) argue that many countries have no clearly defined national policies or procedures to facilitate sustainable development. Traditional planning approaches to tourism span from boosterism, economic industry-oriented, physical/spatial, community-oriented and sustainable approaches (Getz, 1986; Hall, 2000). According to Hall (2000), boosterism is the planning approach dominating tourism and it sees all tourism as ‘good’. The notion that tourism development is inherently and only ‘good’ is, however, questioned by many academics investigating tourism (e.g. App & Crompton, 1998; Bramwell, 2004; Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997; Getz, 1986; Hall et. al., 2015; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Lansing & De Vries, 2007; Nyapanea et al., 2006; Richards & Hall, 2000; Simpson, 2008). Hall (2000; 2008) argues that a truly sustainable approach to planning entails integration with other planning processes, preservation of nature and ecological processes, protection of human heritage and biodiversity and a more holistic planning. Governmental approaches to planning can thus determine whether tourism development is solely seen as an economic growth factor or if more long-term approaches to development, and thereby sustainability, characterises the planning processes.
Measuring STD

There are various ways in which to operationalise and measure sustainability and thus many approaches suited different development processes or projects (Hall et al., 2015; Lansing & De Vries, 2007; Sneddon et al., 2006). Therefore, in order to determine STD several measurement tools and assessment methods are available. Many researchers (e.g. Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Schianetz, Kavanagh, & Lockington, 2007; UNEP & WTO, 2005; Zeppel, 2015) have investigated how STD can be operationalised and one tool often recommended for measuring sustainability is indicators.

Sustainability indicators are one of the most widely used and recommended tool to assess the sustainability of tourism projects and destinations (Butler, 1991; Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005; WTO, 2004; Zeppel, 2015). According to Miller and Twining-Ward (2005), indicators should measure different aspects of sustainability considering ecological, social, economic, institutional, cultural and psychological dimensions. There are different ways in which to group indicators and the most commonly used in sustainable tourism is economic, social, cultural and environmental (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005). Within these groups, there are many possible measures and the list of indicators varies depending on different aspects such as, for example, the specific destination, tourism policy, involvement of stakeholders and the local community (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005). As the Danish politicians did not, to the authors’ knowledge, explicate which areas of sustainability were considered relevant in regard to the pilot scheme, the grouping applied in this paper will be based on the most commonly used indicator areas: environmental, social and economic. Some of the environmental indicators of particular relevance in coastal areas are the loss of biodiversity, erosion, pollution, protection of nature, waste management and degradation of ecosystems (App & Crompton, 1998; Atik, Altan, & Artar, 2010; Font & Harris, 2004; Hall, 2009; Neto, 2003; Rajan et al., 2013).

Socio-cultural effects from tourism are well documented and concerns regarding local communities seem imperative in sustainable tourism development (e.g. App & Crompton, 1998; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Cole, 2006; Dahles, 2000; Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997; Getz, 1986; Richards & Hall, 2000). Important socio-cultura effects and indicator areas are: community participation/involvement, local empowerment, protection of local heritage, community wellbeing and quality of life (Benckendorff, et al., 2009; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Cole, 2006; Dahles, 2000; Liburd, Beckendorff & Carlsen, 2012; Nyaupanea, et al., 2006; Simpson, 2008; Tosun, 2006). Finally, economic effects are among the most well-documented in tourism (Neto, 2003; Pratt, 2011) and key economic indicator areas are economic growth, employment, new investment opportunities, linkages and multiplier effects (App & Crompton, 1998; Eriksen & Ahmt, 1999; Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997; Pratt, 2011).

In order to further determine how sustainability is communicated in the project proposals, already well established baseline issues and indicators are relevant. Baseline issues identified by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) & United Nations
World Tourism Organisation (WTO) (2005) which are relevant for all tourism development (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005; UNEP & WTO, 2005) and consequently also the ten development projects. These baseline issues are: Local satisfaction with tourism, Effects on local communities, Economic benefits of tourism, Tourism seasonality, Energy management, User intensity of area and Development control of the area. The remaining baseline issues of water availability and consumption, drinking water quality, sewage treatment and solid waste management (UNEP & WTO, 2005) are not deemed, predominantly because Denmark is a country with advanced, integrated systems that already address these issues. Furthermore, this paper is only examine the written proposals and not the actual implementation of the projects.

Although indicators are one of the most commonly used tools, they have also been subject to criticism. For example, Hall (2000) argues that there has been a tendency to choose the indicators easiest to measure, or the ones with the most visible and tangible effects, which are often economic in nature. Zeppel (2015) further argues that social and community issues are often overlooked. Nevertheless, indicator areas are a viable tool in addressing sustainability issues in tourism development (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005). The sustainability issues and indicators identified as relevant for the ten project proposals are applied as evidence and signs of awareness concerning environmental, socio-cultural and economic effects, use of indicators and baseline issues as identified above. Throughout the analysis of the ten project proposals, we look for any mentioning of these issues. The theoretical framework in this paper is thus built around the three pillars of STD and relevant baseline issues. The ten projects are still at the planning phase and the analysis seeks to detect and discuss representations of STD by looking at the issues and indicators outlined above in the written project proposals. In the subsequent section, we account for the ten project proposals through the lenses of the theoretical framework on sustainability.

Findings
The term sustainability is mentioned and applied very differently in the ten project proposals. Only projects 3 and 9 (Dune hotel in Løkken and New Nordic Coast) offer terminological explanations. Projects 3, 5, and 9 use the word more frequently than the other projects (9, 11 and 8 times respectfully). Four projects do not mention sustainability at all, thereby leaving sustainability unaccounted for (see table 2). The remaining proposals show substantial difference in the depth of describing, defining and applying sustainability. Projects 2, 3, 5, and 6 associate sustainability with the use of building materials e.g. natural and certified wood. None of the projects refer to the use of indicators as a measurement tool. The content analysis furthermore exposes a dominating economic focus in all ten project proposals. This is in line with previous findings on public approaches to tourism development (Hall, 2000; Hall et. al., 2015). All ten proposals emphasise positive local economic effects, connotated by words and phrases such as economic growth, economic development potential, economic value, number of jobs, tourism revenue and increase in revenue from tourism (see table 2). All project proposals mention how the projects will increase overnight stays and visitation.
to the area. Projects 2, 5, 6 and 9 include calculations of the expected increases in bed-nights. Project 3 (Dune hotel in Loekken), 5 (Nordals Holiday resort) and 9 (Visitor center at Stevns Klint) apply the term ‘economic sustainability’. The total expected increase in numbers of tourist pr. year for the ten projects is around 2,175,000. This includes both increases in overnight stays and day visitors. Such economic factors are all relatively easy to calculate to demonstrate positive effects from the projects whereas other socio-cultural and environmental issues are more difficult to account for and thus are largely unaccounted for in the proposals. This finding is in line with previous studies (Hall, 2000; Zeppel, 2015). Furthermore, as most of the ten projects require sizable financial investments, calculations of the needed expenditure are included in some of the proposals.

Seven of the project proposals display awareness of socio-cultural effects, using words and phrases such as accessibility, community wellbeing, local heritage and culture, local pride and identity, and use of local resources. Project 3 (The dune hotel in Loekken) mentions social sustainability. Furthermore, nine of the project proposals point to local environmental effects by using words and phrases such as protection of the local environment, nature interpretation/education, effects on protected areas and use of natural/sustainable building materials. Project 3 (The dune hotel in Loekken) and Project 5 (Nordals Holiday resort) mention environmental sustainability directly. As opposed to the calculations of visitor numbers and estimated profit included in many of the proposals, there are no specific calculations of socio-cultural and environmental effects or their intrinsic worth. Although many of the project proposals display some awareness, few describe how to deal with and handle adverse effects.

None of the project proposals point to long-term aspects and effects from the projects as they frame the proposal within a period of three to five years. Project 3 (the Dune hotel in Loekken) displays awareness of environmental effects most directly and points to an already established action plan regarding the project’s possible environmental effects. Furthermore, the municipality’s tourism policy in project proposal 3 states [translated by the authors]:

“Tourism must be developed on a sustainable platform with respect for values in the surrounding environment and cultural heritage and under consideration of the local community” (Hjoerring Municipality, 2015)

Project 9 (Visitor center at Stevns Klint) also describes a tourism policy with elements of sustainability stating that [translated by the authors]:

“An increase in tourism must not damage or exploit the values of Stevns Klint and must consider the wellbeing of the local community” (Dansk Bygningsarv & Absolut Landskab, 2015)

Several baseline issues are included in the project proposals. Economic benefits of tourism are clearly communicated in all ten proposals whereas issues regarding
controlling the development in the area and user intensity were not directly detectable. Six project proposals communicate awareness of the effects tourism could have on the local community but only three project proposals mentioned local satisfaction with tourism. Five of the project proposals mention tourism seasonality as an issue that the projects will help minimise. None of the project proposals go into depth with tourist satisfaction, or provide proof of demand for the individual project e.g. through market survey. Lastly, four project proposals address the use of sustainable or renewable energy e.g. solar and waterpower. Table 2 below summarises relationships between the ten project proposals and the theoretical framework.
Table 2: Evidence of STD in the ten development project proposals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words or phrases communicated in the ten project proposals</th>
<th>Project no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- no mention in proposal + mention in proposal</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times the word sustainability is mentioned</td>
<td>0 2 9 0 11 6 0 0 8 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of sustainability</td>
<td>- - + - - - - - +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of indicators as tool to address sustainability</td>
<td>- - - - - - - - -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Environmental Awareness**

| Environmental sustainability                              | - - + + - - - - - |
| Protection of the local environment                       | + - ++ - - - - - + |
| Effects on protected areas                                | + - + + - - - - - |
| Action plan to deal with possible environmental effects    | - - + - - - - - + |
| Nature interpretation/education                          | + - + - - + - + - |
| Use of natural/sustainable building materials             | - + + - + - - - - |
| Use of renewable energy                                  | - + - - + - - - - |

**Social Awareness**

| Accessibility for all (guests, locals & disabled)          | - ++ ++ + - - - - + |
| Involvement of locals                                     | - - + - ++ - - ++ - |
| Local pride & identity                                    | - + - - - - - + - |
| Local heritage & culture                                  | - - + + + + - - ++ |
| Community wellbeing                                       | - - - - - - - + - |
| Authenticity                                              | - - - - + + - - + |
| Social sustainability                                     | - - + - - - - - - |

**Economic Awareness**

| Development potential from tourism                        | + + + + + ++ + + ++ |
| Increase in revenue from tourism                           | - + + + + + + + + |
| Increase in no. of bednights/tourists                     | + ++ + + + + + + + |
| Jobs created by tourism                                    | - + - - + - - + + |
| Economic growth/value from tourism                         | + + + + ++ + ++ - ++ |
| Economic sustainability                                   | - - + - + - - + - |

**Time Aspect**

| Long-term 5+ years                                       | - - - - - - - - - |
| Short-term 3-5 years                                     | + + + - + + - + + |

**Baseline issues**

| Local satisfaction with tourism                           | - - + - + - - - + |
| Effects of Tourism on communities                         | - + + + + + - - + |
| Sustaining tourists’ satisfaction with the project        | - - - - - - - - - |
| Tourism seasonality                                       | - + + - - - + + + |
| Economic benefits of tourism                              | + + + + + + + + + |
| Energy management                                         | - + + - + - - - - |
| Development control                                       | - - - - - - - - - |
| Controlling use intensity                                 | - - - - - - - - - |
Discussion and Conclusion

The ten project proposals relate to sustainability in differing detail and form. Overall, commitment to STD or evidence of advanced understandings of sustainability are weak. Nevertheless, the ten proposals addresses the main pillars of sustainability (i.e. environmental, socio-cultural and economic principles). Project 3 (The dune hotel in Loekken) communicates environmental issues and is the only proposal that points to an existing action plan that addresses environmental effects. Many of the proposals have little or no mentioning of environmental effects, especially in the long-term. A study from) of the top ten reasons for tourists visiting Denmark conducted by VisitDenmark (2015) documents priorities of the main attractions. These are open access to the coastline, sea and beaches is no. 1, nature is listed as no. 4 and clean and environmentally friendly as no. 6. This demonstrates that tourists visiting Denmark value pristine and unspoilt coastal and beach areas, which are key to the attractiveness of Denmark as a holiday destination. Consequently, it would be reasonable to expect that environmental concerns and awareness were high on the agendas for the ten development projects, especially in the planning phase, in order to ensure Denmark’s position as a coastal and nature destination. However, very few project proposals shows signs of commitment to environmental issues, such as loss of biodiversity and degradation of beaches and coastal zones, although these are well-documented internationally in coastal zone areas (Bramwell, 2004; Hopkins et al., 2012; Rajan et al., 2002; Wesley & Pför, 2010). Policy or plans for how to address long-term impacts or how to control user intensity steaming from the proposed increase in tourist numbers are not communicated in any of the proposals. In regards to socio-cultural effects of tourism, the project proposals do not communicate this, with the exemption of project 9 (Visitor center at Stevens Klint), which mentions social concerns of the local community. Generally, the ten proposals do not address aspects of quality of life or subjective wellbeing by locals and tourists, even though these have been found to be a critical part of STD (Bramwell & Sharman, 2000; Cole, 2006; Liburd, et al., 2012; Simpson, 2008; Tosun, 2006). Local support, involvement and environmental preservation appear to be missing if the ten development projects are to contribute to a sustainable development of tourism in the select coastal areas of Denmark.

Other baseline issues and indicator areas, although identified and adaptable to local scales by UNEP & WTO (2005), were fully absent in all of the ten proposals. Rather, issues relating to tourism’s economic benefits were strongly communicated. Larger-scale tourism development often needs substantial external funding as local capital is rarely sufficient (Nyaupanea et al., 2006). This is the case for several of the ten development projects. Tourism affects local communities and although many of the project proposals point to new local job creation, there is little mentioning of how the projects are otherwise to deliver positive effects. By relying on external investments, many of the benefits from tourism will not necessarily benefit the local community as leakages can arise. Economic leakages are often a large problem for tourism development (Dahles, 2000; Eriksen & Ahmt, 1999; Mowforth & Munt, 2016) and
although there is no proof of whether this might be the case for the ten development projects, the project proposals do not communicate much about how to deal with potential leakages.

A strong focus on economic measures and goals are evident in all ten proposals and this aligns with a boosterism approach to planning, as opposed to a sustainable approach. Hall (2009) argues that we need to challenge the economic discourse in tourism, which is a well-established critique of tourism as a means to development (Liburd, 2010). Socio-cultural and environmental sustainability are not equally prioritized. Notably, the proposals aim to attract more tourists, increase tourist capacity and other, positive economic effects at the expense of a holistic understanding of STD.

According to Hall et. al. (2015) STD requires a steady state economy with limits to growth and expansion, meaning that the tourism market cannot forever expand. Steady state tourism is a tourism system that encourages qualitative development but not aggregated quantitative growth (Hall, 2009). If this argument holds true then the proposed total increase in number of tourists based on predictions by the ten projects is a threat to the development of sustainable tourism. This total increase in quantity proposed by the projects in a country like Denmark raise concerns about how sustainable the development of tourism proposed by the ten development projects actually are? Additionally, the ten project proposals work with rather short time frames, failing to display any long-term planning or reflection about the quality and values of nature. Halkier (2014) argues that short-term thinking of both public and private stakeholders is well-known in destination development across Europe. The economic discourse and shorter-term planning periods communicated in the ten project proposals could be seen as limitations to sustainable development of tourism in Denmark and may point to enactments of sustainability that do not correspond with theoretical understandings of sustainability.

**Policy and Government Role**

The role of governments as catalysts for incorporating sustainable principles and measures is well known (Bramwell & Sharmann, 1999; Hall, 2000; Mowforth & Munt, 2016; Simpson, 2008). As mentioned previously, the criteria for being selected as part of the pilot scheme were originally [translated by the authors]:

1. **There must be a potential for developing coastal and nature-based tourism, attracting foreign tourists and the possibility to deliver this potential within the project.**
2. **The construction of physical projects must be connected to existing tourism activities in the area to ensure the largest possible synergy and the project must adhere to other political considerations for tourism in the planning of the municipality to ensure a cohesive development of the area.**
3. The physical projects must be sustainable and adapted architectonically to match the surrounding nature and landscape” (Danish Business Authority, 2014: 13)

The analysis of the ten proposals shows that criteria one is present in all the project proposals. Most proposals points to issues such as attracting more tourists, increasing the number of foreign overnight stays and economic potential of the project. Criteria two is also visible across all ten proposals as the proposals mentions, for example, the municipalities’ current tourism policies, other development projects and matches between development projects. There is, however, little mentioning of how the ten projects align with other plans for e.g. local infrastructure (although project 8 mentions the new Femern Belt connection between Denmark and Germany in connection with its potential to attract more tourists). Criteria three is also, to some extent, visible as all ten proposals address how the projects will be adapted to align with the existing landscape. However, the use of the word sustainable differs significantly across the ten project proposals. The three criteria are the instrument the Danish government chose to foster and evaluate tourism development through. Halkier (2014) notes that weak directions and guidelines are often offered by policy makers, hereby leaving tourism actors with vague ideas about desirable forms of tourism development. The fact that the call did not define or explain the meaning of sustainability, following which it was omitted from criterion three leaves the ten project proposals with very different levels of awareness, focus and tools that are relevant in a sustainable tourism setting. The analysis suggests that without a proper definition of sustainability offered by policy makers, tourism actors focus on traditional approaches to economic growth: new job creation, increased revenue and visitor numbers, are evidence very much in line with previous findings (Hall, 2000; Zeppel 2015).

Our analysis also suggests that the approach to tourism planning taken by the Danish government is very much in line with boosterism where tourism is seen as inherently ‘good’ and as a development tool for economic growth (Hall, 2000).

Furthermore, the pilot scheme does not seem to facilitate or inspire coastal tourism development in Denmark to be concerned about sustainability. Hall et al. (2015) argue that STD is a serious policy problem that poses a challenge for authorities, who need to select the best possible set of policies and tools. It is unclear how the Danish policy makers envisaged the sustainable development of tourism in the coastal areas or why sustainability vanished from the final selection process of the pilot scheme project. What is clear, though, is that without a clear definition or explanation of what kind of STD was intended, there are no clear guidelines for tourism actors to follow when attempting to integrate sustainability into project proposals. If tourism is to make a genuine contribution to sustainable development then it becomes vital that tourism is enacted as a part of larger socio-economic and bio-physical systems (Hall, 2009), and
that sustainability is taken seriously (and not treated as an easily discarded ‘add on’) by policy makers who set the scope for amore sustainable development of tourism, especially if promoting this in previously protected coastal zone areas.

References


